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AUTHOR Partridge, Susan
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ABSTRACT

Designing multicultural curricula to the satisfaction of those concerned is a Herculean task, but, with equality in mind, it is worth educators' effort. Christine Sleeter has discussed five views of multicultural education: (1) teaching those exceptional and culturally different; (2) the human relations approach; (3) single-group studies; (4) the multicultural approach; and (5) the social reconstructionist approach. Articles appearing in reputable educational periodicals indicate that considerable thought is being given to designing a multicultural program that is truly multicultural. Cooperative learning and peer teaching have been receiving considerable support as effective learning techniques. It was observed through decades of educational work that people of various ethnic groups have been respected and honored in schools, and teachers have been understanding of the needs of their students who were of various ethnic groups. Throughout the decades, respect for the various ethnic groups is a widespread and complex problem, as some groups "hate" each other. Throughout decades, witness has been borne to the failure of many innovative programs because the innovation was not gradual. Implications include: (1) encourage educators to be the chief designers of multicultural programs; (2) consider alternatives to tracking as a possible means of providing greater equality for all; (3) emphasize common humanity of all people, not their differences; (4) make inservice help readily available; (5) implement well-thought-out programs gradually; and (6) develop students' listening skills to help them to be more tolerant. (Contains 10 references.) (RS)

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Susan Partridge

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Multicultural Education Discussed

ED 371 403

What IS multicultural education? There are different views and, consequently, different approaches currently in use. The intent in this discussion is to stimulate thinking which, hopefully, will help educators design programs that are truly multicultural.

Five existing views are explained clearly by Christine Sleeter (10) and followed by her comments. Following this, personal comments based on decades of educational experience at both the elementary and secondary levels and in various geographical areas are added.

At the beginning of Sleeter's article, she offers this challenge, "To respond to American diversity more effectively, all five involve substantial reworking of the existing education program." This is readily followed by an explanation:

The first approach is Teaching the Exceptional and Culturally Different. Sleeter defines it thus: "It aims to help students of color, low-income students, and/or special education students achieve, assimilate, and 'make it' in society as it currently exists." She explains further:

> Teachers using this approach have very high expectations for academic achievement. They believe that the traditional curriculum is sound for all students, but that different students require different teaching approaches.

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This approach does not advocate changing the emphasis on content of disciplines of study, only "marketing" them more effectively to a wider diversity of students.

Sleeter continues with an explanation of the remaining groups and explains some aspects which she feels are not truly multicultural as well as some difficulties in designing an acceptable program that is.

> The Human Relations approach attempts to foster positive interpersonal relationships among members of diverse groups in the classroom and to strengthen each student's self-concept. Teachers here are concerned with how students feel about each other. The Human Relations curriculum includes lessons about stereotyping, individual differences and similarities and contributions to society by groups of which students are members; lessons and special events are supplemental to the main curriculum. Cooperative learning is used to promote student-student relationships.
>
> Teachers attracted to the Human Relations approach generally regard American society at large as fair and open. They view disharmony among students (such as racial name calling or social segregation on the playground) to be a result of misunderstanding or untrue stereotypes. They believe that providing information about groups as well as contact experiences will eliminate disharmony.
>
> Single-Group Studies is an umbrella term for units that focus on particular groups, such as ethnic studies, labor studies, women's studies, or disability studies. This approach seeks to raise consciousness about a group by teaching its history, culture, and contributions, and how it has worked with, or been oppressed by, the dominant group in society. Single-Group Studies courses were created in the 1960's and 1970's as alternatives to the main curriculum of the university or schools, which is strongly based on the experience of white men. Textbooks today may seem to be multicultural, but they are still white and male-dominant and treat other groups in a very fragmented fashion.
>
> Often teachers attempt well-meaning lessons and

units about other groups, but without realizing it, they replicate distortions or inaccuracies.

> The Multicultural approach to education reconstructs the entire education process to promote equality and cultural pluralism. Curriculum content is reorganized around perspectives and knowledge of diverse American racial and ethnic groups, Americans, both sexes, and diverse social classes.
>
> The Multicultural approach also reconstructs other processes in education that traditionally have not promoted high achievement for all students. Under this approach, tracking and ability grouping would be greatly reduced or eliminated for institutionalizing differential achievement and learning opportunity, which contradicts equality.

Throughout decades, witness has been borne to some of the devastating results of tracking. It was observed that the bottom track often consisted of behavior problems, slow learners, those with a language problem, etc.

Though decades have passed, there is a clear memory of a Greek mother who appeared at the school her son attended and, with tears in her eyes, begged for his removal from the bottom track. She explained, "I know my son has a language problem, but he isn't a 'hood.'" "Hood" was a popular term in use for behavior problems.

Each student is, indeed, unique. There are great differences among students in their interests which are ever-increasing with advances in technology, their mental and physical strengths, their learning styles, their conduct, etc. If by "high achievement for all students," it is meant that the uniqueness of each will be the guiding force in designing

appropriate programs for ALL students, this is commendable, but, if not, certain students might be struggling to achieve beyond their capabilities; this presents a problem. Other problems include financing and getting qualified teachers who are able to cope with the great diversities among students.

That the Multicultural approach "deliberately fosters equal academic achievement across groups; achievement does not take a back seat to interpersonal relations: is a reminder of having borne witness, throughout the decades, to achievement being affected by poor interpersonal relationships.

Sleeter said at the beginning of her article that all five existing programs "involve substantial re-working of the existing education program." She says about the last, the Social Reconstructionist approach, "I regard this last approach as the one most in keeping with American ideals of equality and democracy," but she is aware that it, too, presents a problem. She explains:

> The Social Reconstructionist approach begins with contemporary social-justice issues that cut across diverse groups, using disciplinary knowledge to examine them and create ways of effecting change.
>
> In the Social Reconstructionist approach, students are encouraged to learn to take action on issues. On the basis of studying an issue such as religious freedom, for example, some members of a class may decide to organize a letter-writing campaign to congressional representatives on behalf of Native American religious freedom.

She hastens to add that this approach is challenging and

uncomfortable for many people because "it takes democracy and equality very seriously, not accepting the platitudes with which we were raised."

Sleeter's explanations of the five views and her comments about them are, indeed challenging to those who would design a program that is truly multicultural. Fortunately, articles appearing in current reputable educational periodicals indicate that considerable thought is being given to designing a multicultural program that is truly multicultural.

The latest edition of the Journal of Reading is a guest-edited, themed issue on classroom talk about text. The guest editor, Rosalind Horowitz (3) says that so many excellent papers were submitted in response to a request, only seven could be selected for this edition. Many of the multitudinal aspects to be considered in designing a program that is truly multicultural are covered, among them are gender inequalities in text, grade levels, cultural variation of discourse, facilitating student-to-student discussion through cooperative learning principles and techniques, etc.

Cooperative learning and peer teaching have been receiving considerable support as effective learning techniques. However, some negative aspects have been discovered. Jeanne Shay Schumm (9) tells what gifted students thing about cooperative learning. She writes:

decided to take a look at this student-centered approach from the eyes of those most involved - students. Her particular focus was on gifted middle school students as a preliminary phase of a larger (yet unpublished) survey with 800 subjects. Her preliminary findings cast some doubts about the benefits of cooperative learning in heterogeneous groupings for gifted students. Her findings follow:

> When placed in heterogeneous learning groups, gifted students are frequently thrust into leadership positions that they are not prepared to assume. These students reported their frustration in explaining material to others who had a difficult time understanding or who were unmotivated to do so. Their perceptions about "learning through teaching" were generally negative, and they were generally concerned about how working with uncooperative group members might affect their grades or the quality of their products.
>
> On the other hand, they were much more positive about the social and academic benefits of working with other gifted students in homogeneous cooperative learning groups.

Schumm acknowledged the egalitarian benefits of cooperative learning, but feels that "the comments of these youngsters suggest that Americans still have some work to do toward learning how to make cooperative groups function well and comfortably."

Keith Hillkink (2) offers three reasons why cooperative learning should be placed at the core of the teacher education curriculum: (1) the research base clearly attests to the academic and social skill benefits of cooperative learning; (2) cooperative learning is motivating and worthwhile for teacher education students; (3) cooperative learning fosters development of interpersonal skills that enhance efforts to restructure schools and development programs.

It is felt that if teachers receive the proper training and

are given in-service help and encouragement, cooperative learning can be used to advantage in teaching children of various ethnic backgrounds who may lack the confidence to speak in a large group. Too, it should increase self-esteem and improve group relations.

Vesta L. Mickel (6) had described cooperative learning thus: "Cooperative learning refers to instructional methods in which students work in small mixed-ability groups. Each group operates as a team and the teammates are responsible for their own learning as well as that of their teammates."

Some current reports indicate that mixed-ability grouping receiving some attention. In the April/May 1994 issue of Reading Today, the following report was noted:

> More than 1.6 million of the 5 million children in the United States with disabilities who receive special education and related services are attending school in regular classrooms, according to data collected by the U.S. Department of Education.
>
> "Historically, we have had two education systems: one for students with disabilities and one for everybody else," said Judith Heumann, assistant secretary for special education and rehabilitative services. "We are working to create one education system that values all students. The regular classroom in the neighborhood school should be the first option for students with disabilities."

There are still some two-story schools in our country. This makes it difficult for some physically-disabled students. In the past, witness has been borne to the successful handling of several such cases. The case of Walter, a high school students,

is an example that is vividly remembered.

Walter was a bright and happy young man who was loved by his peers who took turns, voluntarily, to carry his books up and down the stairs thus allowing Walter to make the use he needed of the handrail.

Needless to say, there are many factors involved in the use of the regular classroom for all students; these factors need considerable thought.

Many informative articles on multiculturalism continue to appear in reputable educational periodicals and in popular magazines such as Time, Newsweek, etc. as well.

In a late edition of Newsweek, Joe Klein (5) writes in an article, "The Threat of Tribalism," the following:

> In a world of wires and images, it often seems easier to communicate evil - to hype great differences like pigment and religion than the more subtle complexities of our common humanity.
>
> All of which represents a profound threat to the very idea of America. We are not and never have been a multicultural society. We are a multiethnic society that is unicultural.

Klein goes on to say that if we allow those who seek to exploit our differences gain the upper hand, we run the risk of tribalism.

Members of a large group of people of various ethnic origins attending a Technical Community College were asked what they liked best about America. The response, "Freedom?" was, without

hesitation, loud, clear and in unison. These people know the price they paid for their freedom, and it is believed they will cooperate in preserving it. Some have been known to remind others of their same ethnic background of the value of cooperation in preserving the freedom enjoyed in the democratic way of life.

Perhaps the thoughts of these people about the importance of freedom are similar to those recalled being sung in schools many years ago. The beginning of the song is a reminder of the price paid for freedom, and the end is informative as to how to preserve it; they follow:

Hail Columbia
by
Joseph Hopkinson

Let independence be our boast,
Ever mindful what it cost,
Ever grateful for the prize;
Let its altar reach the skies.

Firm, united let us be
Rallying round our liberty,
As a band of brothers join'd,
Peace and safety we shall find.

As this paper is being written, our newspapers are filled with accounts of the joy of the South Africans in their long-awaited freedom.

It was observed through decades of educational work that people of various ethnic groups have been respected and honored in our schools. It was also observed that most teachers were

very understanding of the needs of their students who were of various ethnic groups and were generous in the help they gave them. Granted, times and conditions have, and continue to change. However, some changes are for the better. Educators now have many more resources from which to draw than they had in past years. A few of the many examples, which show the absence of prejudice, follow: Thaddeus Kosciusko, a Polish patriot who fought for freedom in America and Poland and Casimir Pulaski, a Polish soldier who joined Washington's forces and distinguished himself in the Battle of Brandywine were remembered in our history classes.

Music is universal, and many songs composed by those of various ethnic groups were sung, and thoroughly enjoyed, in our public schools. A few of the great number follow: Funiculi-Funicula, credited with being the most famous song of Italian composer, Luigi Danza; The Marseillaise, the national hymn of France which was sung in both French and English; and God Bless America which was written by Irving Berlin who moved with his family from Russia to New York City at an early age. It is felt that his song shows the family's deep appreciation of the freedom enjoyed in America.

It was noted throughout the decades that gaining respect for the various ethnic groups is a widespread and complex problem, as some groups "hate" each other. It is remembered that a young high school student, a Lithuanian, repeated again and again, "We

Lithuanians hate Polacks!"

Recently, a retired British subject, visiting America, said in response to a statement that a Mercedes is a good car, "Yes, it is, all but one thing; it's German." He added, "We [meaning his fellow countrymen] don't like them." It was learned that his grandmother had been killed in a German air raid in World War II.

There was a recent newspaper report that a young black man, who was walking along the street in a North Carolina college town with his white friends, was accosted by a group of blacks who shouted derogatory remarks at him. They called him "Uncle Tom," "Oreo," etc., and beat him to the extent that he had to be hospitalized.

These are but a few of numerous examples that could be offered to show that prejudice is not a respecter of race, age, color, religion, or anything for that matter.

Speaking of the importance of respect, Clarence Page (7), a writer for the Chicago Tribune writes,

> I advise students of all colors that they should not let their desire to seek cultural "comfort zones" when thrown into an unfamiliar environment like a university campus prevent them from using the campus experience to learn more about cultures that are new to them, including that of America's socio-economic mainstream.
>
> Besides, old cultures never die in America. They are absorbed.

He remembers that Texans adapted their distinctive culture -- boots and all -- from Mexicans and that Alaska's unique culture

is largely adapted from the natives. He concludes:

> We don't need political correctness. We don't need to tip-toe around each other's feelings. All we need is to show respect. sometimes we can learn a lot from other cultures.

In a very late edition of Time Magazine (April 4, 1994), Leon Jaroff's (4) article, "Teaching Reverse Racism" offers food for thought. He writes that "fallacies are being included in public school multicultural courses in a growing number of U.S. cities and espoused in black-studies departments of some college campuses." He explains further:

> The ideas represent the views of extremists within the Afrocentric movement which is intended to acquaint U.S. blacks with their long-ignored African heritage and raise their pride and self-esteem. While approving of the legitimate aims of Afrocentrism, many educators, both black and white are concerned that its excesses will subvert the very goals it seeks to accomplish.

Jaroff quotes both black and white professionals, one of whom is David Pilgrim, a black sociologist at Ferris State University in Big Rapids, Michigan. Pilgrim says, "I'm embarrassed by what I know to be faulty science. By the same token, I'm sympathetic to the social forces that produce it."

Sarah-Ellen Amster (1), Assistant Editor of The Harvard Education Letter writes that anti-racist education makes the invisible visible. An example given at the very beginning of her article leaves no doubt in the reader's mind that she has some

"food for thought" to offer. The example follows:

> A young black college student in a psychology-of-racism class observes one day that she has never been assigned to read any books by black authors, and attributes this to cultural racism. Tom, a white senior, says nothing but later writes in his journal, "It's not my fault that blacks don't write books."
>
> This incident makes visible the impact of missing information. Nobody sat Tom down and said, "There are no black authors," explains Beverly Tatum, of Mount Holyoke College, who has taught the psychology of racism for 13 years." But the fact that he had not been exposed to them led him to that conclusion."
>
> The debate over the definition of "multicultural" education has never been so muddled. But Tatum says, "I think about it in terms of anti-racist education. Not, 'Let's appreciate diversity,' but "Why don't we appreciate diversity in the first place?'"

There are some teachers who, on their own are doing that. They believe that there is something universal about literature, and they want children to read about other's sorrows, fears, worries and experiences.

Though many decades have passed, a personal memory comes to mind. A little Navaho Indian girl lived with her aged grandmother who was trying to finish making a blanket for her granddaughter before she died. The little girl would wait for an opportunity to unravel some of her grandmother's work so that it would take her longer to finish it. It is believed that there are children of various ethnic backgrounds who could relate to this story.

Throughout decades, witness has been borne to the failure of many innovative programs because the innovation wasn't gradual.

The programs were introduced before teachers, who had had no part in the designing of the program, lacked the information vital to the success of the program.

Tobias Rulker (8), Professor of Education at the School for Advanced Pedagogical Studies in Berlin, is among those educators who recommend gradual innovation. Rulker offers a number of other considerations in designing successful multicultural programs. He writes:

> The present emergence of multicultural societies in many countries is only partly due to a pluralist education, which indeed is not even the most decisive contributing factor. The main trends involved are determined by policy decisions taken at various levels, within the framework both of the state of the economy, and the processes of social change to which they give rise. These decisions depend, for example, on legislation and on the housing, social, economic and employment policies of states, but also on the investment policy of large firms and the way in which they recruit their labor and develop their market strategies.
>
> There is, however, at least in democratic societies, a very complex relationship between these policy decisions and the opinions and attitudes of citizens who may accept and support decisions in favor of multicultural education but who may also oppose them and go over to politicians who promise to amend them. It is, after all, the citizens who have to live in this multicultural society, who have to discard their prejudices and practice tolerance and who have to shake off the traditions of colonialist and national mentality.

It is concluded that designing multicultural curricula to the satisfaction of those concerned is a Herculean task but, with equality for all in mind, it is worth the effort.

It is further concluded that educators should take the lead. Throughout the years it has been noted that programs have been hindered by unauthorized people. Some irate parents have been known to try to dictate how schools should be run, as have board members whose authority consists of their vote on school issues brought before the board, not on dictating how schools should be run, as they seek their own aggrandizement.

It is true, fortunately, that these irate parents, unauthorized board members, and politicians have often been in the minority, but it is also true that their interference was a serious disruption of the smooth running of the schools by those qualified and authorized to do so.

It is felt that educators are capable of knowing and seeking the help they need in designing multicultural curricula with equality for all. Among these people are staff members of teacher-training institutions, parents, fellow teachers, social agencies, etc.

Decades of being witness to teachers being assigned to teach programs for which they were given no preparatory work and no in-service help, and the resulting failure and dropping of programs have been convincing that this practice should be relegated to the past forever.

Implications

1. The designing of multicultural curricula based on the uniqueness of the students for whom they are intended, and with equality for all, is a Herculean task, as there are numerous ramifications.

2. Educators, with the help of all those people and organizations whose aid they feel will enable them to design multicultural curricula with equality for all, should be the chief designers of the multicultural programs.

3. Consider alternatives to tracking as a possible means of providing greater equality for all.

4. Emphasize common humanity of all people, not their differences. Begin early and seek the cooperation of parents.

5. In the selection of texts, guard against a lack of important information as well as erroneous information, as ignorance fosters prejudice.

6. Literature is universal; good use should be made of it in emphasizing likenesses among people and in discouraging prejudice. Seek the help of librarians.

7. Discourage unauthorized dissenters, for though they may be in the minority, they can hinder progress.

8. Implementation of a well-thought-out multicultural program should be gradual.

9. In-service help should always be readily available to teachers.

10. Emphasize our oneness, as divisiveness has, and continues to, result in utter disaster with needless loss of life and suffering. Centrism denies democracy.

11. Develop students' listening skills as this will not only help them to be more tolerant and more knowledgeable, it will discourage prejudice as well.

12. Teachers should exercise their voting rights and elect those politicians who have the best interests of educators and students at heart.

13. Keeping a positive attitude is a great help in undertaking a Herculean task. Our many dedicated teachers, our almost-endless resources, the fact that most people in the various ethnic groups will cooperate in preserving the democratic way of life which they sought here, the knowledge that both black and white educators, though approving of the legitimate aims of Afrocentrism, are concerned with its excesses, and an ultimate aim of striving for equality for all should encourage those designing multicultural curricula.

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